

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 313031

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SP, MT

SUBJECT: GOS INTEREST IN IDEA OF MALTESE NEUTRALITY

REFS: A) MADRID 9448; B) NATO 6995

1. MINTOFF HAS SUGGESTED A TREATY BY WHICH EUROPEAN AND ARAB SIGNATORIES WOULD GUARANTEE MALTA'S SECURITY AND ECONOMIC VIABILITY AFTER THE DEPARTURE OF THE BRITISH IN 1979. FOR YOUR BACKGROUND WE ARE POUCHING TEXT OF DRAFT TREATY. IN ADDITION TO THE FRG, ITALY, AND LIBYA, MENTIONED REFTEL, THE PROPOSAL HAS BEEN SUBMITTED TO FRANCE, THE UK, ALGERIA AND TUNISIA. ITALY HAS ALSO RAISED IT AT NATO AND THE EC.

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2. THE BASIC PROBLEM FOR MINTOFF IS TO FIND A SOURCE OF REVENUE THAT WOULD REPLACE SOME \$80 MILLION A YEAR THAT MALTA DERIVES FROM THE BRITISH PRESENCE. THIS FIGURE INCLUDES \$36 MILLION IN UK/NATO ANNUAL BASE RENTAL PAYMENTS, TO WHICH THE US CONTRIBUTES \$9.5 MILLION UNDER A 1972

AGREEMENT AMONG NATO COUNTRIES TO HELP DEFRAY THE COST TO THE BRITISH. OTHER PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES ARE ITALY, FRG, BELGIUM AND THE NETHERLANDS. NEITHER MINTOFF NOR THE UK WISHES TO EXTEND THE BASE AGREEMENT BEYOND THE MARCH 1979

EXPIRATION DATE. THE BRITISH START THEIR WITHDRAWAL EARLY IN 1977.

3. ITALY SUPPORTS MINTOFF'S PROPOSALS

AND FRANCE HAS SHOWN AN INTEREST. THE FRG HAS BEEN NON-COMMITTAL, BUT IT AND THE UK APPEAR WILLING TO DISCUSS THE QUESTION OF MALTA'S FUTURE AT THE EC. THE BELGIANS AND THE DUTCH ARE INTERESTED AND HAVE ALSO ASKED OUR VIEWS ON MINTOFF'S PROPOSED TREATY. MINTOFF ALSO CLAIMS TO HAVE THE SUPPORT OF LIBYA, ALGERIA, AND TUNISIA.

4. MINTOFF SENT A COPY OF HIS PROPOSAL TO THE SECRETARY IN JULY. WE DID NOT COMMENT SUBSTANTIVELY BUT STATED THAT WE WOULD REMAIN OPEN TO EXCHANGES ON THE SUBJECT. IN A MEETING WITH DEPUTY SECRETARY OF DEFENSE ROBERT ELLSWORTH DECEMBER 16, MINTOFF URGED THAT WE ENCOURAGE EUROPEAN INTEREST IN HIS PLAN.

5. WE ARE SYMPATHETIC TO THE ECONOMIC PROBLEMS MALTA WILL FACE AFTER THE BRITISH WITHDRAW. WE WELCOME THE INTEREST OF MALTA'S EUROPEAN NEIGHBORS IN THE ISLAND'S FUTURE, AND WE FAVOR EUROPEAN ASSISTANCE TO MALTA. WE HAVE NO OBJECTION TO ECONOMIC AND SECURITY GUARANTEES FOR MALTA BY EUROPEAN COUNTRIES. HOWEVER, WE DO NOT WISH TO TAKE ANY INITIATIVES IN THIS MATTER OR TO SHOW ANY US INTEREST THAT

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MINTOFF MIGHT EXPLOIT.

6. THE ITALIANS, WHO ARE MOST DIRECTLY CONCERNED WITH MALTA'S PROBLEMS AND WHO HAVE SUBSTANTIAL HISTORIC, CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC TIES WITH THE COUNTRY, HAVE TAKEN THE LEAD IN SEEKING ASSISTANCE FOR MALTA. THEY HAVE RAISED THE ISSUE BILATERALLY WITH OTHER COUNTRIES AND AT THE EC. WE CONSIDER IT APPROPRIATE THAT THE ITALIANS TAKE THE LEAD AND HAVE ENCOURAGED THEIR INITIATIVE IN THIS DIRECTION

FYI: WE HAVE, HOWEVER, OPPOSED ITALIAN ATTEMPTS TO INITIATE A COMPREHENSIVE NATO STUDY ON MALTA, AS THE MAIN ISSUE IS PRIMARILY AN ECONOMIC PROBLEM WHICH WE FEEL IS MORE APPROPRIATELY DISCUSSED IN SOME OTHER FORUM. END FYI

ROBINSON

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